

THE ANGEL OF PEACE

this religious left his order, threw aside the habit, and returned to his house in a village some way from Siena, and there he lived half desperate. And she, when she knew that he had gone away, prayed God for him that He would have mercy upon his soul. But at last this man, persevering in his despair, hanged himself by the neck."^x One of Catherine's letters is directed to a religious who had left his order, a sweet and most loving letter throughout, ending : " If I were near at hand, I would know what demon has stolen away my little sheep, and what is the bond that keeps him bound, so that he does not return to the flock with the others. But I will strive to see it by means of continual prayer, and with this knife to cut the bond that holds him ; and then will my soul be happy." ² But this is probably another man.

Among the correspondence of Catherine's disciples, we find two piteous letters addressed at this time to Neri di Landoccio at the Rocca. In one, the writer, in answer to an affectionate message conveyed to him by Gabriele Piccolomini, wonders that Neri remembers him, now that he has become " a vessel of contumely," and is ashamed to write to any servant or friend of God. " I was once thy very dear brother," he says in the other, ^{tc} but now, for a long time, I have found myself dismissed and cancelled from the book in which I felt myself so sweetly fed. Do not wonder if I have not written to thee, or if I write to thee no more, until I return to gather the fruit of true obedience, of patience, and true humility. But I have so long wandered from the true way, that I almost judge it impossible for me ever to find or taste that food, or to reach a place of repose. And this has happened to me because I have kept the eye of my understanding closed with darkness, and driven the light away from

¹ See Grottanelli, notes to the *Leggenda minore*, pp. 354, 355, and cf. the different story in the *Legenda*, III. vi. 14 (§ 408).

³ Letter 173 (134). An almost contemporary Latin version of a portion of this is in the Vatican, *Cod. Vat. Lat.* 939. Cf Letter 192 (275), where Catherine assures Neri di Landoccio, who was always in dread about his own final perseverance, " that God will not permit in thee what He permitted in that other."